

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT, UK (NI)

SUBJECT: BORDER POLL RESULTS

REF: BELFAST 39

1. FOLLOWING ARE SIGNIFICANT FIGURES RELATING TO MARCH 8
BORDER POLL:

- A. TOTAL ELECTORATE 1,031,633
- B. TOTAL VOTES CAST 604,256
- C. BALLOT PAPERS REJECTED 5,973
 - (1) NO OFFICIAL STAMP 140
 - (2) VOTING FOR BOTH QUESTIONS 3333
 - (3) MARKED SO VOTER IDENTIFIABLE 568
 - (4) UNMARKED OR VOID FOR UNCERTAINTY 1923
- D. TOTAL VALID VOTES CAST 598,283
- E. TOTAL VOTES TO REMAIN PART OF UK 591,820
- F. TOTAL VOTES TO JOIN WITH REPUBLIC OUTSIDE UK 6,463
- G. PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE THAT VOTED 58.6
- H. PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE THAT ABSTAINED 41.4
- I. PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE THAT VOTED FOR UNION WITH UK 57.4
- J. PERCENTAGE OF ELECTORATE THAT VOTED TO JOIN WITH REPUBLIC
OUTSIDE THE UK 0.6.
- K. PERCENTAGE ON VALID VOTE FOR UNION WITH UK 98.1
- L. PERCENTAGE OF VALID VOTES TO JOIN WITH REPUBLIC OUTSIDE

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UK 1.1

2. BOTH SIDES SAW VOTING FIGURES AS VINDICATING THEIR PREPOLL POSITIONS. UNIONISTS (WITH A SMALL " U" LOOK AT ITEM K, ABOVE , AND CALL RESULT " OVERWHELMING" AND " IRREFUTABLE" PROOF THAT ULSTER WISHES TO REMAIN BRITISH. NATIONALISTS LOOK AT ITEM I AND SAY VOTE PROVES WHAT WAS ALREADY KNOWN (THAT THERE ARE MORE PROTESTANTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND THAN CATHOLICS) WAS " NARROWSQUEAK VICTORY" FOR PROPARTIONISTS, AND WAS " SHOCK" TO UNIONIST PARTY SINCE, WITHOUT NILP AND ALLIANCE PARTY SUPPORT, VOTE FOR LINK WITH UK WOULD HAVE BEEN LESS THAN 50 PER CENT.

3. MAIN POINT OF CONTENTION IN INTERPRETING RESULT REVOLVES AROUND WHO ABSTAINERS WERE (OR PUT ANOTHER WAY, HOW CATHOLIC VOTERS BEHAVED). NATIONALISTS CLAIM ALL ABSTAINING VOTE FOR THEMSELVES AND SAY IT REPRESENTS "40 PERCENT" THEY HAVE BEEN CLAIMING ALL ALONG. UNIONISTS POINT OUT THAT AVERAGE TURNOUT OF VOTERS AT GENERAL ELECTIONS SINCE WW II HAS BEEN 72 PER CENT, AND SUGGEST THAT CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF PROUNIONISTS WOULD NORMALLY HAVE ABSTAINED IN BORDER POLL TOO, PERHAPS AS MANY AS 20 PER CENT. FOLLOWING THIS LOGIC, BRIAN FAULKNER CALCULATES THAT MORE THAN 71,000 CATHOLICS MUST HAVE VOTED FOR LINK WITH UK. HE ADDED THAT " NOT ONLY DID QUARTER OF CATHOLIC POPULATION DEFY CALLS TO ABSTAIN AND BOYCOTT POLL BUT THOSE CATHOLICS WHO VOTED FOR MAINTENANCE OF UNION AMOUNTED TO ONE IN EVERY FIVE. (CONGEN GETS LOWER FIGURE: ELECTORATE OF 1,031,633 TIMES PROTESTANT (I. E. ALL BUT CATHOLICS) PROPORTION OF POPULATION 65.1 PER CENT EQUALS PROTESTANT ELECTORATE OF 671,593 TIMES PROPENSITY TO VOTE OF 80 PER CENT EQUALS PROTESTANTS WHO VOTED FOR LINK WITH UK 537,274. TOTAL VOTE FOR LINK 591, 820 LESS 537,274 EQUALS CATHOLICS WHO VOTED FOR LINK 54,546. THIS WORKS OUT AT 15 PER CENT OF THE CATHOLIC ELECTORATE).

4. SPOILED BALLOT CATEGORIES NUMBERS WERE NOT SIGNIFICANT. UNMARKED AND VOID FOR UNCERTAINTY GROUP LOOKS TO BE MAINLY VOTERS MAKING SURE THEIR BALLOT WAS NOT USED BY SOMEONE ELSE (PERSONATION) THOSE VOTING FOR BOTH PROPOSITIONS COULD HAVE BEEN EITHER CATHOLIC OR PROTESTANT, ALTHOUGH MORE LIKELY THE FORMER. FOR MANY CATHOLICS (PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF LAST WEEKS POLL IN SOUTH SHOWING ONLY 39 PER CENT IN FAVOR OF UNITY)

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LINK WITH UK (NOW) AND JOINING WITH REPUBLIC (IN FUTURE) WERE

BOTH FIRST PREFERENCES. THIS POSITION WAS ARGUED IN PREPOLL CAMPAIGN PERIOD BY GERRY FITT HIMSELF. PRESUMABLY SOME VOTERS SYMPATHETIC TO HIS VIEWS WOULD HAVE BEEN PERSUADED SO TO VOTE. PROTESTANTS WHO DESPAIR OF PERIODIC TROUBLES AND WHO BELIEVE UNITED IRELAND IS ONLY LONGRUN SOLUTION CONCEIVABLY MIGHT ALSO HAVE WANTED TO EXPRESS THIS DOUBLE PREFERENCE. IT WAS, HOWEVER, NOT A POSITION THAT RECEIVED ANY SUPPORT IN CAMPAIGN. IN SHORT, FOR CATHOLICS IN THIS GROUP IT WOULD BE UNION WITH UK NOW AND UNITY OF IRELAND LATER: FOR PROTESTANTS IN THIS GROUP IT WOULD BE UNION WITH UK NOW OR UNITY OF IRELAND LATER (IF FIRST PREFERENCE DOESN' T WORK).

5. DESPITE NEW VENUE OF VIOLENCE (LONDON), QUANTUM OF VIOLENCE ATTENDING BORDER POLL WAS RATHER LESS THAN MANY EXPECTED. AND BORDER POLL HAS UNDOUBTEDLY HAD OVERALL SALUBRIOUS EFFECT OF MAKING PEOPLE HERE THINK ABOUT POLITICAL ACTIVITY. TV PANEL PROGRAMS BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER POLL WERE VERY HEARTENING IN THAT THEY SHOWED POLITICIANS OF EVERY STRIPE BATTLING EACH OTHER WITH WORDS -- A PLEASANT CHANGE OF TELEVISION DIET. NEVERTHELESS, IMPORTANCE OF POLL SEEMS TO RESIDE, AS NILP EMPHASIZED THROUGHOUT, IN FACT THAT POLL WAS ONE OF A SERIES OF STEPS, STARTING FROM DIRECT RULE, LEADING AWAY FROM VIOLENCE AND TOWARD NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR GOVERNANCE OF ULSTER.

6. NEXT STEP IS WHITE PAPER. IT WILL BE CONSIDERABLY GREATER HURDLE TO GET OVER. BORDER POLL DID NOT PROVOKE MUCH VIOLENCE BECAUSE IT WAS REGARDED AS NONEVENT BY SIDE WHOSE INTERESTS IT COULD MOST ADVERSELY AFFECT. IN ADDITION, PROVOS WERE (AND ARE) CLEARLY SPLIT ON TACTICS VISAVIS VIOLENCE THAT THEY SHOULD NOW BE PURSUING. WHITE PAPER, ON OTHER HAND, CAN HARDLY BE REGARDED AS NONEVENT BY ANYBODY, AND WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE ATTENDED BY LARGE SCALE DISAPPOINTMENT ON PROTESTANT SIDE. WHILE THERE MAY BE SOME DISARRAY ON TACTICS ON THEIR SIDEN TOO, HARD MEN ON THAT SIDE ARE NOT WORN DOWN BY LONG CAMPAIGN. NOR HAS THEIR COMMUNITY SUPPORT BEEN SAPPED BY OPPRESSIVE PRESENCE OF GUNMEN AND THEREFORE PRESENCE OF SOLDIERS AS WELL. WITH EXTREMISTS FROM BOTH SIDES LIKELY TO IN FIELD, POTENTIAL FOR LARGESCALE VIOLENCE FOLLOWING WHITE PAPER IS OF ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MAGNITUDE.
PENBERTHY

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